

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 9U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT
18 August 1986**CURRENT PROFILE**

JESSE HELMS

Senate crusader vs. the world

■ He has managed in time to nettle most of the Arab world, plus Panama, Mexico, China, the Departments of State and Treasury, the Central Intelligence Agency and Ronald Reagan—to say nothing of many of his own colleagues.

Not bad for a man as deceptively mild looking as Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), whose staff is now the target of an FBI security probe. At issue: Did one of his aides reveal to Chilean officials a covert U.S. effort to intercept internal communications of the Latin country's military?

True to form, Helms's reaction has been feisty. He denies any wrongdoing and insists that he is being victimized in a "smear campaign" by officials of an administration he has accused of betraying conservative ideals.

In 13 stormy years in Washington, Helms has won a national following among conservatives by doing on Capitol Hill what he did for years in Raleigh, N.C., as a television commentator, grimly crusading for traditional values and "new right" policies. The Senate chamber has replaced the studio as his forum.

This reputation as a chronic naysayer is one that Helms wears lightly. "I was elected to stand as firmly as I can for what I believe in, and against what I don't," he said in an early-August interview. "That fella who came down from Sinai was a naysayer, too—although I don't put myself in his class."

Critics like to dismiss the habitually ruffled Helms as a largely ineffectual obstructionist. Yet while Helms's ultimate legacy is debatable, his impact is not. He has turned matters precious to conservatives into national issues and, in the process, forced colleagues to take politically painful positions. His stands on issues such as school prayer and abortion have also boosted funding for many new-right politicians.

President pays piper

Helms has, along the way, forced White House compromises, using his leverage as senior Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee to delay confirmation of Reagan appointees. To speed one envoy's glacial passage through the panel, for instance, Reagan had to grant a demand for a ban on U.S. funds to countries that force abortion.

In recent months, Helms, 64, has upset leaders of Panama and Mexico with a barrage of corruption charges, angered Arab leaders with utterances on the Mideast and caused heartburn for

Treasury and Chinese negotiators with complaints about a U.S.-China tax pact.

In July came a Chilean foray in which he backed strongman Augusto Pinochet and urged the sacking of the American ambassador for attending the funeral of a U.S. resident slain during antigovernment protests in Santiago. Men in military uniforms doused the victim with gasoline and set him afire. The White House wants Pinochet out and democracy restored.

The matter of the alleged leak may not fade away quickly. There is long-standing spy-agency concern about Congress's handling of secrets, and the Helms case offers a new platform for airing reservations. Beyond that, Helms correctly says his downfall would delight a growing list of enemies, including many opponents at the State Department and the CIA, which he attacks as "soft on Communism."

Widely seen as a crusty loner in the Senate's clubby atmosphere, he does few favors and expects none. And he shows no sign of mellowing in dealings with adversaries inside or outside the Senate. Diplomats at Foggy Bottom, he says with a shrug, are miffed "because I opposed some of their little pet nominees. . . . Maybe I ought to start holding up some more. And I probably will if they keep up this nonsense." It's just the kind of fight Helms relishes most—him against almost everyone else. ■

by William L. Chaze with Andy Plattner